

**The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project**

An Oral History with Sul and Lutaf Virani

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Narrator: Sul and Lutaf Virani

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**Abstract:**

Lutaf Virani was born in Kampala, Uganda, and his wife Sul Virani was born in Singida, Tanzania. Lutaf worked in a sporting goods store while Sul had experience working for the solicitor general's office and Gailey and Roberts Company. They married in 1966 and were living in Kampala when the expulsion decree was issued.

After landing in Montreal with their two young children in 1972, Sul and Lutaf initially settled in Longueuil where Lutaf found work at a sporting goods store. They are now retired and living in Toronto.

In this interview Sul and Lutaf share memories of their early lives in Uganda and describe their experience arriving in Canada at the Longue Pointe reception centre. They share stories of their early years in Montreal and discuss their experience raising their children in Canada.

This interview was conducted in Toronto, Ontario.

**Heather LeRoux:** “Okay so today is June 20, 2016. I’m Heather LeRoux interviewing Sul Virani and Lutaf Virani for the Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project. So I’m going to start with Lutaf, if you want to go ahead and tell me a bit about yourself, and where you’re from.”

**Lutaf Virani:** “I was born in Uganda and my name is Lutaf Virani. I was born in Nasambiya hospital in Kampala in 1941, when Pearl Harbour was bomb, December 7th. My nickname... my father nicknamed me Tojo. At that time the pilot of the Japanese pilot who bombed Pearl Harbour, his name was Tojo [laughter]. So I was born then. Do I have any brothers or sisters? Yes, I have a big family. We had six brothers and three sisters, a very big family but at that time, everybody had that kind of family.

I guess as far as childhood is concerned, we had a rough time and a very good time. Very good time in the sense that all the brothers and sisters took care of each sibling. It was like the father is busy and we couldn’t afford to have a babysitter or anything like that so it was all family, brothers and sisters bringing you up at that time. As far as schooling is concerned, we had what we called a government school. At the time the British were in power and Uganda was run by the British. So we had some government schools, and we also had the Aga Khan School. So I went to Aga Khan School to study. The rest of my brothers, some went to the government school and some to the Aga Khan School, and then graduated from there. What else would you like to know?”

**Heather:** “Did you go to university there, how old were you...?”

**Lutaf:** “No, I didn’t. That part... what had happened was because we had a big family, we had a lot of struggle. So I finished my high school and was put into business by my father, so I had a sporting goods store that I was running in Uganda. We became really well to do after, we supplied tracksuits and things like that which were sponsored by Puma, they gave it to Uganda athletes who went to all the big games in 1968 to Germany. We sponsored them at the time and it was a good thing. The reason for me not going to college was to keep the family going, all that so, by that time a few brothers got married, and they went there way so the onus was on me. I had the younger brothers too and had to support the family.”

**Heather:** “Right, so you worked with your brothers. That’s great. Do you want to give me a little but about your [Sul] background and where you’re from?”

**Sul Virani:** “Yeah, sure. I was born in Singida a very small village or town in Tanzania. I am the middle of the family, we were four brothers and five sisters, I’m about the sixth one. We had a very simple childhood, you know. We used to play community games, and for entertainment, we used to just go and get some beads and thread them into necklaces, and then go and sell it in the market and go and get some goodies from there, and come home and eat. That was our... picnic and fun outdoors. We never had anything technical at that time, at the time, I suppose there was not much. But in any case, we didn’t have a very elaborate life.

Then at the age of ten... just before that my father decided he would like my sister to go and study in Uganda so he brought her here. Then afterwards we all immigrated there and he opened up a shop there and we just started studying and he put my two elder sisters into telecommunications, they hardly knew much English but they learned and he was teaching them, he was a teacher. Through all his life, he was a teacher, and then a principal in Singida. My father was from India and he married a lady in [Lamu], Kenya, and they were just struggling anyways and he got a job as a teacher. And I seem to remember a particular incident when he was bringing us to Uganda and he was... at the railway station someone asked him, he had one child on his back, and he was holding two children’s hands and my mother had the other children’s hands. The man is asking, “Where are you going?” And he says “To Uganda.” “With all these kids, what are you going to do there? Do you think that you have any livelihood there, are you going to be okay?” He says, “God will provide.” But he was very hardworking and industrious. Even when he retired, he wanted to do something to stay on. And in Uganda, I went to Aga Khan School for a little while, then I transferred over to a government school, I was a prefect there, and then I was a head prefect. Prefect... what do you call it?”

**Lutaf:** “They call it a head monitor or something.”

**Sul:** “Monitor. And we had groups of houses. Houses in the sense that we compete with each other sports and debates.”

**Lutaf:** “Like classes against classes, you know?”

**Sul:** “No, different teams. Teams that they would form like a sports team and form a debating team and compete so that was very interesting, We used to play netball, we girls. Netball is like basketball, but it’s different... it’s not so hectic. What else? Now after I graduated from high school I taught in a primary school for a year and then I decided that I would do some secretarial course and then I went to a community college, Uganda College of Commerce to study there. That was quite an experience because then you learned how to do things, like how to open up a bank account and learn how to manage your money. Then I had a job with the government it was very interesting, solicitor general’s office. Then I met him [laughter]. We used to be in the same circle of friends, and we got married in 1966 and we had two children. In 1972 when this occurred... when Amin declared that Ugandan Asians must go, we were really shocked. We had a birthday party for our daughter.”

**Sul:** “There were so many Africans there too, friends of ours. Through his sporting goods, we had quite a few ethnic friends. Everybody was lamenting so much, why did Amin Dada do this? It’s not really good for the country because the country was prospering and now it’s going to... you know, everybody is going to get out of here because it’s not stable. It will be a shortage of so many skills like doctors, plumbers, you know so many skills will be lost. And that’s what happened for sure.”

**Heather:** “So when you met, were you both living in Kampala?”

**Sul:** “Yes.”

**Heather:** “And your kids... one of your children was ten months?”

**Sul:** “My daughter was three and a half, and my son was only born in November of 1971 – only ten months old. Of course, I forgot to tell you when we were in Uganda, my brother and his wife decided – she’s a gynecologist – that they wanted to immigrate to the states. We were all crying because we thought we would never see them again, you know. But within a year this happened and my father and mother, they went to them. It was nice that we could be together again and they could visit each other, you know.

**Heather:** “Okay. So you mentioned the party, but was there anything else leading up to the announcement that you had heard at the time? Or was there any kind of sense...”

**Sul:** “Yes. What had happened is he was... Amin Dada had proposed to Muljibhai Madhvani’s daughter-in-law, one of the daughters-in-law who recently lost her husband and he eyed her – she was pretty and all that – and he wanted, he sent a proposal to her parents. And the parents got very disturbed about it because in their religion they cannot possibly do that.”

**Lutaf:** “Now this guy was a multimillionaire in Uganda, and this is his... Madhvani, he owned plantations and that was his daughter in law.”

**Sul:** “So then Amin turned round and said the Asians must go. He said he dreamed about it last night that they said they were going to take over the country, and so the Asians must go. Those are left behind will be in concentration camps. So everybody is frightened, everybody is talking about this issue.”

**Lutaf:** “You asked the question, what memories you we have about Uganda. You want the good memories or the bad memories?”

**Heather:** “Anything you want to share, anything you are comfortable sharing. Yeah, anything you want.”

**Lutaf:** “Good memories I had was...Uganda was so beautiful, the weather was fantastic and beautiful. I used to play cricket and tennis. That’s one memory I had. The other memory I have is... when I was in school and I was a young teenager we used to... we had a canteen at the school but the canteen didn’t provide any good food for us so we used to sneak out. There used to be a shop... like a small restaurant and they used to have cassava. Cassava is a staple food in Uganda, cassava and green banana. This guy used to make fried cassava. So we used to sneak out and go and eat. I remember the first time we saw a bottle of coke, it was a big bottle, they called it hostess. So we used to chip in our five cents each and buy a bunch of cassava fried and go and eat them and enjoy it.

[Interruption]

**Sul:** "Is there anything else?"

**Lutaf:** "All of our experiences living... I was thirty-one years old."

**Sul:** "No, no, I was thirty-five, you must have been thirty-seven."

**Lutaf:** "It can't be, 1972, I was born in 1941... so thirty-one years, you were twenty-nine. We got married in 1966."

**Sul:** "Ah okay, you're right. So I was only twenty-nine and you were thirty-one. Yeah, we had a good experience in Montreal and what happened is we were coming through and lots of people who were going to Canada had escorts to the airport which is about twenty miles from Kampala. But other people didn't have an escort so on the way the military was standing around the road and robbed them. And when we came to the airport I was... my son was only about ten months old, so I was feeding him and they went through my bags and took a few things. Before that, nobody had money. He was lucky that through his sports thing he managed to sell things to people who managed to get money out, but otherwise nobody had money."

**Lutaf:** "You couldn't take more than a hundred dollars out of the country at the time, that's what you were allowed. A hundred dollars, no more."

**Sul:** "Then when we arrived we had a straight flight and when we arrived at Montreal had such a beautiful welcome from the Canadian... so many volunteers and government people."

**Lutaf:** "Very, very organized."

**Sul:** "Yeah just to say my son was so young he was in his diaper right, so they took him straight away to change his diaper and give him milk. Then they gave us food there and they took us shopping for the next day for winter clothes which was very nice and then they told us we could go and visit at manpower, employment."

**Lutaf:** “The other memory I have, I don’t remember the exact year but it was 1958 or 1959, I was a good tennis player at school. So I was picked by the school to get a bit of coaching, the guy who coached me was a guy called [Pancho Segura]. He came on with Kramer’s Circus Club at that time [Jack] Kramer took players and turned them into professional tennis players. At that time there were no professionals, there were four of them. One was Pancho Segura, Mal Anderson, Ashley Cooper and Frank Sedgman. There’s a photo of them when they came to Uganda playing an exhibition. So each school sent one player each to be coached by them. So that was a good memory I had, I went and learned my tennis from there. Yeah it was such a great occasion.”

**Heather:** “That seems like a good opportunity.”

**Lutaf:** “I was amazed with how they played tennis and how they hit the ball. It was like going to Wimbledon [laughter]. Once when I established my shop, the sports shop. We used to play at the Lugogo Stadium there, tennis and all that. There used to be a ball boy there, a young African kid, very promising tennis player. I used to partner with him sometimes to train for tennis. So I was approached by B.A.T., which is British American Tobacco Company. They wanted to sponsor this kid to go to the States and learn tennis there. But they didn’t know how to... because he was living in a small village and it was hard to know, so they wanted someone to take care of him and groom him, prepare him to go to the U.S. So they approached me and I said, “Okay, I’ll take him in.” I took him to my house and my wife and myself, we kept him there for a month. You know, taught him how to speak English – he could speak English – but not that good. I believe now he’s in the States, he never came back. He got married... there he met someone in the States and has a couple of kids, that’s what I hear. I never got in touch with him but somebody else told me. I am still looking for his phone number so maybe I can... his name is Eustice [Tisongo]. Very good tennis player, I gave him free tennis rackets at the time, shoes, clothing, everything. These are all the good memories.”

**Heather:** “Yeah, that’s a good story.”

**Lutaf:** “And the bad memories... after Idi Amin declared that all Asians must leave Uganda and he put a curfew on the city, everybody has got to be inside their house by seven o’clock no one can go out. But one day my wife, Sul, went out to play badminton and was late heading home and she didn’t realize the



time, so quickly she put my daughter in the car. And we were living a bit further away from where she was by fifteen minutes from there.”

**Sul:** “So let me tell the story. Yeah what happened is, as soon as I got out of playing badminton. I got out of the [Shimoni] area, when I arrived at the corner I saw Kondos [thieves] were standing there so I just quickly sped up and as I was speeding along they were trying to zig zag to overtake me and I wouldn’t let them so I kept on. But then they knocked me from the back and then I got jittery and I was shaky and all that, so I tried to reverse. I’m not a person who can reverse easily then they overtook me and they showed me guns. I said, “Let my daughter go and let me go.” I was just coming out when I realized I didn’t have my shoes, because I used to drive without shoes and I said, “Sorry, can I take my shoes?” So they told me, “Get out, get out.” They weren’t interested... I had to get out. Get out of the car.”

**Sul:** “And there were people watching this event, but you could see they all locked their doors because they didn’t want anyone to get in their homes either. So I had to wait until the Kondos were gone, and then they opened their doors for me. We didn’t have a home phone, no cells either but any time we needed it we’d just run to the neighbours. So I phoned the neighbour and asked them to speak to my husband and to have him come and pick me up and I was sorry we asked. But they found our car at the university campus.”

**Lutaf:** “It was taken by a student, a black student.”

**Sul:** “Shattered inside, very dirty... but at least we found it back.”

**Lutaf:** “The good thing was she was not harmed, neither was my daughter. Thank god for that. Because some stories that we heard of Idi Amin’s rule was terrible... a friend of mine, he was locked up in Uganda. Before this thing happened there was a king called the Kabaka, the Kabaka was the king, a Baganda king. In Uganda, you had about four Kings. And this king was living in Kampala in his own palace and he had a wall around. Kabaka ran away to England. Now my friend was arrested for no reason and they took him to Luzira; they wanted to torture him. At night, somehow he jumped over the wall and escaped. He was telling me about it and he said it was so bad, everybody was scared, you know. Every night when you’d go to sleep you’d hear bang, bang, bang, guns going off, some shooting is going on and you’re scared all the time. It was a very, very nervous time and very insecure, you didn’t know what was going to happen the next day.”

**Sul:** "Yeah my eldest brother in law was trying to help a neighbour, and the soldiers came where he was staying. They were trying to hurt somebody and beat somebody up, one of his neighbours. So he was trying to help him..."

**Lutaf:** "To intervene. They beat him up so badly..."

**Sul:** "So badly. That's when they decided, let's get out of here."

**Heather:** "So all of that happened after the expulsion decree, when you were past curfew?"

**Sul:** "Yes."

**Heather:** "So did you wait a little bit to leave, or?"

**Sul:** "No, no. You have to put things into perspective. So what had happened was he had declared that anybody who was not a citizen had to leave, right? So we all had to go and prove that we are citizens or not. So for me what happened was I went to check it out. They said because I had not renounced my previous citizenship, which was British protectorate. At the age of eighteen, when I turned eighteen my father didn't do it, and this is why I am declared stateless. So now it's going to be very traumatic for me what to do, I have nothing to travel by, right? No papers. My mother was a British protectorate like Kenya, where she was born. So through her one of my sisters and myself, we could get the British protectorate passport or document. One of my brothers in laws is a lawyer; this is what he told us, that we could apply for a passport through that. I went to the British embassy and there you had to wait for so long, there's so many people."

**Lutaf:** "Line up. From the morning to evening you don't know when your turn is going to come."

**Sul:** "And also I had to... there were no public washrooms there, whatever was there was very dirty, you couldn't possibly use it... I don't know. So I walked back home to go to the washroom, eat a little bit, and come back. And they got angry at me, "Why did you leave?" Now we had to go to the back of the line, so I turned around and made a big protest about it and I said, "What do you think? We are not human"

beings? You expect us to be here day in, day out, and not expect us to have any needs?" So I was a little aggravated and shouting a little, so they took me inside. Then they turned around and said, "You do not have any right to get a British passport. And I said, "No. I know that I do have a right. I got a lawyer and the lawyer has told me that definitely I have a right through my mother. I am not going to move from here until you get me my document."

**Sul:** "So then they agreed, but then they put the stipulation that my passport, I wanted my kids names on it too because I didn't want them to leave it out of documents either. It was very hard to get it from the Ugandan government, you know. So the British government put a stipulation in it that in one year I had to renew my passport and the kids have to come out. Your kids will be out of the passport. But I did get the passport, and then the Canadian embassy with the help of the Aga Khan and Pierre Trudeau agreed to take some refugees from Uganda. So we all applied. We were the first ones from our family to come out of Uganda."

**Lutaf:** "We were on the fifth flight."

**Sul:** "Yeah I was worrying, "What are we going to do? How are we going to get in touch with them? How do we do that?" Because we didn't even know where they were. Anyway, I think that somehow or other there was a good communication within the community so I managed to get one of my sister's information about her so she gave us all the information of where everybody was."

**Lutaf:** “And it is such a panicked state, everybody is worried about themselves, right? You worry about your family, and you want to get out first. Then once you get out, you’re worried about the family that you left behind. So it was tough, but you know thank god that everybody got out in one piece without getting harmed or anything. The other thing... a lawyer called Anil Clarke, that we knew was shot by Idi Amin’s soldiers. They dragged him out of their home just because he showed opposition to him.”

**Sul:** “What about the Chief Justice of Uganda...”

**Lutaf:** “Yeah... the Chief, a black guy.”

**Sul:** “They pulled him by the tie... they took him and shot him. And then they declared that the rebels came from other parts... like maybe Tanzania killed him. But it was them. Later on Idi Amin did a lot of terror in his own... on his own people.”

**Sul:** “He had many mistresses, so he had one wife I think and she was taken right in front of people and flogged. He was a terrible man. And when actually... Obote, the Prime Minister, had become a little bit of a tyrant and he was taking over the businesses from people, he was doing certain things to harm. So people were a little dissatisfied with him. And when Idi Amin took over, we were celebrating, and my... one of my sister’s mother in laws said, “Mark my words, this man is not going to be good for this country, he has all the bad designs of anyone who opposes him.” Somehow, she sensed it. This is what she said, and that’s what he turned out to be.”

**Lutaf:** “Idi Amin didn’t have an education, he was grade three or four or something like that, and he was a boxer. The good thing is we got out, and Sul used to work for Gailey and Roberts Company in Uganda. When Canada started accepting refugees, her boss told her to apply in Canada. So she applied for a job in Edmonton.”

**Sul:** “No P.E.I. [Prince Edward Island]”

**Lutaf:** “P.E.I. first, but he wanted you to apply to Edmonton, right?”

**Sul:** “No I am sorry, I applied to many cities, Toronto, Edmonton, P.E.I, Charlottetown. It was very interesting how P.E.I. replied to me, they said, “We are happy that you are coming to Canada, but maybe when you come here then you try and get in touch with us because you may not want to come to P.E.I., [laughter] it’s a small town and you may not want to.” Which was interesting, so you know, when we came here I tried to apply here. No wait a minute, when we came my husband had decided that many people are going to go to Vancouver, but we don’t want to go with a whole flow of people, and we’re going to choose Montreal.”

**Lutaf:** “ No Montreal we were going to...”

**Sul:** “Oh Edmonton, yeah, yeah.”

**Lutaf:** “In Montreal the Immigration people said, “Oh, Edmonton is too cold for you. You have two small kids, why don’t you stay over here in Montreal?” I said, “We don’t know anything about it. Okay, we’ll stay here.” Little did we realize that they are getting some money from the government if we stay here in Montreal [laughter].”

**Sul:** “But it was a good experience for us.”

**Lutaf:** “We didn’t care we said, “Okay, fine. We’ll stay here.””

**Sul:** “They told us that we will get a French course, and we did for five months we had a French course while we were staying at the YMCA.”

**Lutaf:** “Nous parlons Francais [vie].” [Laughter]

**Sul:** “And it was a very good experience, my two kids went to McGill later. So we have a good connection with Montreal. We learned French and then I went for another course in French, learned a bit more. ”

**Lutaf:** “She had a hard time getting a job. After five months, we settled down on the island in Longueuil in Montreal. We had an apartment there. I got a job right away but she had to struggle because she had

two small kids, nobody wanted to hire her, plus French was a problem. I found a job with a sporting good company that was okay. Then after a year, we decided... her sister was in Toronto. She said, "Why don't you try to move up here?" So I applied for a job here in one of the sporting goods stores. So a guy said, "Come, we need a person with your experience." And within a month, she got a job here, so it was good. Ever since then it was okay, we'll settle down here and the kids did very, very well. They went to university and they worked, my son right now is an M.P. [Member of Parliament] [Laughter] My daughter is a Heath Consultant."

**Sul:** "He is also Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister."

**Heather:** "Right! He came to see us, the collection, when we came back to Ottawa. So that was great."

**Sul:** "Oh, yes."

**Lutaf:** "For our kids they did very well, we are so happy that the Canadian government provided us with everything. You know they studied, they worked hard, we worked hard and settled down here. No regrets. After being here now forty-three years we've been travelling around and all that, I said Canada is the best country. Best country in the world."

**Sul:** "There are lots of opportunities and we feel that in a way we had a good childhood and a good life in Uganda but we didn't put our skills to use or didn't have all the skills that we needed. When you came here, you realized that you could have done so much better if you had better skills, so that you can cope with the life here, get better jobs, prosper, and do well. But I don't think we've done very badly, you know. Whatever skills we had, we've tried to live up to, work hard, and further our education while we were here, you know. I used to go to Seneca College and learn, take a couple of courses."

**Lutaf:** "The thing I want to mention to you is, after we come back here, and then when Idi Amin was toppled and this President Museveni took over, he wanted all the Asians to come back to Uganda and get our properties back, and all that. My brother who immigrated to England, he went back to Kampala. He claimed his property and he's still living there in Uganda. He's the only brother in Uganda. But he... he can't stand the cold and says, "I don't want to live in England, it's too damp." He likes it in Uganda so

he is still living there, we visited him twice we went to Uganda to see him.”

**Heather:** “How was that?”

**Lutaf:** “We took my son and daughter because they wanted to know... they were too young to understand. So we went visiting... it was... Uganda has expanded now but still there is a lot of corruption in the government, corruption underneath. So they keep on building but they’re not fixing the roads, there’s craters in the roads you can’t even drive around. Otherwise, it is nice, beautiful weather and the country prospering.”

**Sul:** “Museveni. [Ugandan President] Anyways it’s good to see that the local people are prospering, however life is very boring there. Especially... I find that those who have gone back, they live the same kind of life and try to have good homes, big homes, have a lot of servants. Not servants, but a lot of help in the sense that they will have a chauffeur – oh yeah, in Uganda you cannot drive – you cannot drive yourself because the traffic is horrendous, plus there is no rule of the law. No traffic laws at all. They call it boda boda, the taxis they drive is a motorbike. These scooters or motorbikes are big, zig zagging in and out without any care or observing traffic laws and I believe that they do say in the paper that many of them die.”

**Lutaf:** “I’ll tell you an incident that happened to us. My brother was taking us to one resort over there, we had a nice tilapia fish. We sat down there and ate this delicious fish. However, when we are coming back home in the car suddenly there is a policeman down there and he is honking, there is a military truck in front of us waving, “Stop!” My brother stopped and pulled over. They said, “Don’t you know the president is passing through?” My brother said, “We didn’t know the president’s car is behind us, nobody told us.” They said, “Oh, we are going to arrest you.” Just for that. They are pointing a gun at you and we’re scared, and they ask, “Who is this guy?” I said, “I am Canadian. I’m his brother, I’m visiting.” “No, get out, you have to stop when the president’s car is passing by!” The president’s car is three hundred yards behind, how are you going to see that his car is coming through? Everything comes to a standstill and you need to stop. Then my brother they were saying [inaudible], which means money. They were saying, “give me money.” My brother took out some money and said, “This is what I have,” it’s about twenty thousand shillings or something like that, which is not much. To get rid of them you

had to do that. But this is still going on there, they have no respect, people's rights are nothing."

**Heather:** "I know you said you had someone come to Toronto, but did most of your family come to Canada? You had one in the U.K., but was your family mostly spread out?"

**Sul:** "Yes."

**Heather:** "Very spread out?"

**Sul:** "North America."

**Lutaf:** "My brother had a British passport so he went to England. The rest of my brothers and sisters are here."

**Sul:** "What about your sister, she was in England before."

**Lutaf:** "Yeah one of my sisters was in England, she moved to Vancouver. Her daughter lives in Vancouver, she sponsored her to come."

**Sul:** "She immigrated about six or seven years ago."

**Lutaf:** "Yeah she was finding it hard in the beginning. She was missing England so much. But after two, three years she settled down, now she's happy. Vancouver is a nice to visit, but it's not a business place. And Vancouver is very expensive."

**Heather:** "Yes, very expensive. Beautiful, but..."

**Lutaf:** "We go quite often, my wife has four sisters there, I've got two brothers there and a sister now, so we go there. The groceries down there... my god, double the price. I don't know how people survive it. The real estate is so hard, her sister... they bought a house in White Rock for 1.5 million, now it's worth about 3.4 million dollars. So everything is going up."



**Sul:** "My brother in law was a very industrious person, so he bought for two or three years and then he..."

**Lutaf:** "He opened his own business."

**Sul:** "Its auto mechanics and then he slowly, slowly expanded and he went into Bellingham and he had a big business there. About three years back they just sold it."

**Lutaf:** "They were Japanese car engines, [inaudible]. Made good money at it, he just sold it, right?"

**Sul:** Yeah, two years ago. They prospered, everybody has prospered and everybody has done well. Unfortunately we lost my eldest brother in 2001 he had a heart attack. But he passed away well because he went for a reunion, he had studied in India and he had done his doctorate there. So it was a reunion of all the students, you know. He had a very good time and in his sleep, he just passed away. So that was a good... then my youngest brother, he was a nomad. He really liked to move about..."

**Lutaf:** "He wrote a couple of books."

**Sul:** "So he... on New Year's Eve he had gone to a nice party and had a good time. And he came home and he collapsed. It was very sad but we were very happy he visited his sisters and one of my brothers. He had visited in [January]. But he had such a beautiful life that you don't regret it, he had lived his life so fully."

**Lutaf:** "This guy, the younger brother, he could speak about ten languages. He was... there was an incident sometime, it was in Mexico he was picked up."

**Sul:** "No, here."

**Lutaf:** "No, no, no, Mexico when he was camping outside on the beach and he was robbed by the bandits, do you remember that? He was telling us, what happened was he used to go all over the world but at that time he used to take joints and smoke joints. He was a free guy, so he was... he had camped on the beach somewhere in Mexico on one of the beaches and suddenly these bandits came and robbed

him, they took his passport and everything. Now he was without a passport so he went to the police station and they said, "We know the gang that robbed you, but we can't do anything about it, meet up with the gang leader, maybe he can help you." This kid could speak Spanish, so somehow he managed to catch hold of this bandit leader and spoke to him in Spanish and said, "My passport is gone and there is some money. I can't go back anyway, can you help me out?" The leader became very friendly with him, the guy gave him his passport, gave him his money back. [Laughter] He spent a few days with the leader there."

**Heather:** "Oh my gosh! That's so funny. That's quite a story."

**Lutaf:** "This guy was a very good talker, even when he went to America for the first time. People were so interested in knowing what happened to Uganda, how Idi Amin... so he used to relate, very good storyteller. Everywhere he went he got free boarding and free lodging."

**Sul:** "One of my other brothers, he went to Nairobi University and then he immigrated here. He first went to Calgary, then in Vancouver. Then he decided to go to Nigeria for a few years, one of his sons was born there too and... good experience, he's travelled a lot and he's written quite a few books. Unfortunately, he is suffering from Parkinson's disease and he is in a dire state, you know. But he has had a good life, he has written quite a few books."

**Lutaf:** "He was a professor and he used to teach at Queen's... Queen's in the U.S., not here. He has Parkinson's disease now, it's unbelievable. But you were asking us, how do you feel about Canada now? I think that Canada is the greatest country in the world. There is no country in the world where you can go to any restaurant here and have different kinds of restaurants, if you want to have Polish food, you want to eat Ukrainian food, African food, Indian food, Pakistani food. All here. You don't need to go anywhere else. The other thing is, the greatest thing is Canada is teaching the world. The best thing is that all the people from different races can come and exist together. Which, nobody does that. And here... there is no problem here, everybody is getting along with everybody else, everyone minds their own business. In time, you make different friends. My son, when he was in school he had five different nationalities of friends. One was Chinese, one was a black guy, other guy was Sri Lankan, four or five different ones..."

**Sul:** "Canadian."

**Lutaf:** "A white Canadian. His white Canadian friend who went to school with him here, he moved to England. And he came specially here when Arif won the election."

**Heather:** "That's exciting, it must have been such an exciting time."

**Lutaf:** "Then Arif took him to a Raptors game. So they keep in touch with them, you know. Like we are going to a wedding on Wednesday, there is a wedding in Vancouver. So my son is staying with his friend from when he was going to school in Toronto. He is going to stay with him for a few days and come back. These are the kind of friends he has. Now how would you meet a friend like that, you know?"

**Sul:** "Also I wanted to say about my daughter, my daughter was... she went to McGill too, and she became a physiotherapist after graduating."

**Lutaf:** "She did an MBA, too."

**Sul:** "Yeah, after graduating. She should have been a lawyer actually [laughter]. Because she really argues her case about anything pretty well and usually tries to convince even judges, when she has to go to the court, you know. She was in the right. But unfortunately she has had a couple of accidents and that has prevented her from doing physiotherapy, so she is a health consultant and she is happily married with two kids. She has got two beautiful kids, and my son has got two kids too. We are very happy with that, they have turned out to be good kids, unlike some children who grew up here, some are gone into drugs and not thrived well. But we never had problems with our kids. I seem to remember my daughter growing up she was a peer helper, and she used to say, "Mom they talk about how they got crashed last night on the weekend and they just had so much to drink. They have no control over themselves at all so it is really hard to convince them that it is not the way life should be... that you can do it in moderation but not, you know..." all kids go through that part of their lives when they are growing up."

**Lutaf:** "That is a worry in school that kids will pick up bad habits. You can't be with them all the time, you have to trust them, right? Doing their homework and all that, we never had to tell our kids, "Do your homework," they did it automatic. My son you know, we thought our daughter was smarter in school."

When this guy came out with his results, he had done better than her, you know. They had ninety plus marks all the time, they had some scholarships because of that. Sometimes you have to be lucky to have kids like that, you don't have to tell them too much. As parents you always worry, you don't know if they are going to develop bad habits."

**Sul:** "But we played our part. My husband is very good at sports, so he always tried to encourage them to try and play sports and they both have done well in the sense that he took up tennis and she was in volleyball. I did my part in trying to bring them up in a way that nurtured them enough so that they could do things that want to do. We tried to expose them to lots of experiences so then they can decide what they want to do, which was good. You feel good that you did your part. And when he did win in the election, he really praised both of us that we did our part, we helped him. He always tells the story that he, like his dad, always read the sports section only, and I said "Arif you must look at all the other news which is more important because you know what is going on in life. Read something about politics, read something about this... it is going to help you in your knowledge and then you can converse with people, you know what is going on in the world and be aware of it." So that he always remembers, which is a good thing, you know. When he did his internship at parliament a few years back... 2001."

**Lutaf:** "When he was at McGill."

**Sul:** "Yeah, I was telling him that I think you are going to be a politician. "No mom, I'd never be a politician." But now, see."

**Lutaf:** "When he was getting the Wilson Pritchard..."

**Sul:** "Yeah the Wilson Pritchard, my son has travelled quite a bit and had done humanitarian work. He has worked at a few legal clinics here, and the African legal clinic and [S.A.L.C.O]. He was one of the founders of S.A.L.C.O., an Asian clinic, South Asian Legal Clinic and they help people in getting their affidavits done, if they had any problems around their rent, then they would help them. And that was a good experience. Also, he has done some studies about police reform in India. So for that reason also he has gotten this award. So that was very memorable..."

**Lutaf:** [Shows a photo to Heather] “This is him at the parliament when he was sworn in.”

**Heather:** “So exciting.”

**Lutaf:** “That’s his wife and his two kids. This is the Christmas card that he made.”

**Sul:** “So they’ve done good. My daughter really did well too, as I said. Before they got married, she was working in the States and she got laid off so she decided she’d go to India and go shopping there. I suppose it was a really... quite an experience for her because she likes to shop around but she likes to look around first a lot. So as soon as she became sixteen I told her you can take the credit card, she has the same name as me, and she can sign for it. I don’t want to go around walking so much. That is what she had done in India too when we went shopping, we were supposed to go for dinner at my sister in law’s sister’s place and we didn’t finish shopping. When the cars were going home she started buying the things, and there’s about half an hour left and she’s trying to buy things. So we didn’t have time to go there... we were worried because we didn’t have cellphones to really phone them to let them know that they can’t come. I even threatened that I could go by train myself and one of my aunt’s turned around and said, “No, no, my cousin you can’t do that. People hang around here, there’s no way you can hang from the railing, you’re standing outside, you can’t do that.””

**Lutaf:** “My grandfather came from India and my father was born in Tanzania, my mother was born in Kenya. So it was the first time we visited India, a long time and we’d never been to India. That was quite an experience.”

**Lutaf:** “My best thing was when we were in Montreal – they put us up at the YMCA – these people from manpower, they would come around and they had some tickets for ice hockey. I’d never seen ice hockey in my life, so nobody wanted to go and I said to a friend of mine, “Let’s go and see what this is all about.” We went there, the playoffs of 1972, the captain, and Ken Dryden and everyone was playing. We didn’t know who the hell these people were, watching hockey. Suddenly they came out and I told the guy, “This is fantastic, look at the way those guys are skating and hitting the puck around. It was very exciting. So I got hooked and the following game – there was a series, right? – they were playing Chicago I think. So I got the ticket, I went again and ever since then I got hooked. I used to watch hockey, she

used to complain, every time there was a hockey game I had to watch it. Every time I had to watch the game, I became a Montreal Canadiens fan until today, and so is my son.”

**Lutaf:** “I enjoyed it so much, I don’t know... I don’t skate.” [Laughter]

**Heather:** “A very Canadian experience right off the bat.”

**Lutaf:** “It was a great memory there.”

**Sul:** “There also was... they used to take us for trips, you know we were taken to Quebec City.”

**Lutaf:** “For the carnival.”

**Sul:** “The only bad thing about that was the women couldn’t go in the taverns. We were tramping up and down in very cold weather, you know. We were so tired and finally we found a restaurant so we could have some coffee or some... I don’t think we used to drink it. Maybe I did. Anyways... we were so cold we didn’t go see the parade, I said, “I’m going to sit here.” It was good and I took my kids back to see the Quebec City carnival, which was a good experience, but the only thing is they wanted to go to a party. We got the kids, we were trying to go in, I saw beer bottles strewn on the floor, and I said, “No way I am going to let you be here, because you don’t know what can happen.” Out we go. “What about the other kids? We paid for everything.” If you can sell them, fine, but I don’t care let’s get out of here.”

**Lutaf:** “This is another story I have to tell you. I used to work in a sporting goods company in Montreal and there was a guy called Bill Eaton, he used to work with me. He was such a nice guy, he had a cleft lip and a stutter, but he was such a nice guy. When he found out I was a refugee and all that he invited us to his home for Christmas.”

**Sul:** “No, Easter dinner.”

**Lutaf:** “Was it Easter or Christmas? No, it was Christmas. We had turkey, don’t you remember?”

**Sul:** “Yeah but Easter dinner...”

**Lutaf:** "So he used to live in the north, he came all the way to Longueuil and he sent his daughter who came all the way and picked us up, took us to his house. And this guy, one of his hobbies was he used to have a train. You know the toy train. So he had in his basement it goes around, goes to the kitchen and he puts a teapot on it and it brings it back. So my daughter was three and ten months old. But such a nice person. Then he came and dropped us back home, this is the first time she... what is that red sauce?"

**Sul:** "Cranberry sauce."

**Lutaf:** "She said, "Oh, what is this, jam?""

**Sul:** "No, they were passing the cranberry sauce around so I said, "Can I have the jam too?" and they said, "Sorry mom, it's not jam, it's cranberry sauce. [Laughter] Also we stayed in the YMCA for one month and then they gave us some money so we could rent a place and we decided to go in Longueuil, there you could be with French people and learn more French. Which was a good experience for us and we had a babysitter for the kids. But before that when we were at the YMCA, they had taken us because we were missing our Indian food a lot, so they took us too... Mont Blanc? No... some place where, it was some kind of temple and then we had some Indian food because it was cooked by... not monks."

**Lutaf:** "The priests."

**Sul:** "So that was very interesting."

**Lutaf:** "When we were in Toronto, at that time there were not too many Indian groceries so all the spices we are used to, we couldn't buy any. So we had to look for some Indian restaurants, we found that there is some Guyanese people. They were there, but this place was a little bit different, it was okay, we could manage. But now we can, there is so many. That was great."

**Heather:** "That's all I had, but thank you so much for talking to me."

**Lutaf:** "We covered almost everything."

**Heather:** "Yeah!"

**Lutaf:** "So now you know my son is an M.P. my daughter is a health consultant. We are all settled down, we are mortgage free, so we are very grateful to the Canadian government for bringing us here."

**Heather:** "Well, thank you so much!"

[End of transcript]